

RELIGION

141

the Pleiades, and Tolowefy, three very bright stars in a line, at equal intervals. I could not identify the last and it seems to be applied to more than one grouping. Only one star is named, *Feejive*, the planet Venus.

The sun and moon were considered as deities or powers and were often included with the other *Zeahory* in invocations. All informants insisted that they knew no creation myth and I believe that their ignorance was genuine. I found a similar lack among their neighbors the Betales and can only conclude that, if such myths ever existed, they have now been completely forgotten.

CONTROL OF HUMAN AFFAIRS

The core of Tanaia religion is the belief that human affairs are subject to a dual control, that of Beings and that of Fate. The two are of nearly equal importance and both good and evil may derive from either. The Beings interfere capriciously and can be influenced by prayer and sacrifice. Fate, on the other hand, is impersonal and mechanistic. It cannot be influenced by prayer or sacrifice, but its workings can be forecast and its direction changed by magical means. This basic dualism is reflected in a clear cut distinction between the activities of the priest and those of the *oobaiy* ("medicine-man"). The former deals only with the Beings, especially the ancestral spirits, while the latter specializes in the detection and control of Fate and has little to do with the Beings.

The interrelation between the Beings and Fate has never been clearly formulated by the natives. Priests and *oobaiy* whom I interrogated agreed that both derived their powers from the same source, *Zeahory*. It was *Zeahory* or the *Zeahory* (plural) who fixed the destiny of the individual at birth. Whether the ancestral spirits had any hand in shaping it was uncertain, but the majority thought not. In changing destiny *Zeahory* was appealed to, but in a formal fashion, the real efficacy lying in the magical acts accompanying the invocation. Apparently there was a feeling that the ancestral spirits could modify the destiny in minor details, but could not change it as a whole. The whole matter was very hazy in the minds of even the best instructed natives and it was clear that they had not thought about it until I questioned them.

Beings are believed to be of three sorts, a Deity or Deities, Non-Human Spirits, and Spirits of the Dead. The Deity or Deities are conceived of as first causes and sources of the power exercised by Beings of the other two categories. They are remote and shadowy

776 to the native mind and are never invoked alone. The Non-Human Spirits are minor Beings of little power, comparable to our own fairies and goblins. They are sometimes mischievous and terrifying, but are not taken seriously. The Spirits of the Dead take an active interest in the affairs of the living and constantly interfere to assist or injure. They are also partially dependent upon the living, their well being in the spirit world being increased by the sacrifices made to them. They are the objects of Tanala worship to the practical exclusion of all other Beings.

DEITIES

The native term for Deity is *Zanahary* (za, article, *nahary*, "creator"). As a noun the word is used to designate a powerful Being or class of Beings who have never been human. As an adjective it carries the significance of "divine," "supernatural" or simply "extraordinary." I have heard it used with little more weight than the English "wonderful."

The Menabe are vague as to the number of *Zanahary*. Ordinary individuals uniformly say that there is only one. Priests and *ombiasy* hesitate when the question is put to them and I have seen two priests discuss it earnestly, citing passages from the rituals. All the longer invocations include a number of names of *Zanahary* and the point at issue was whether these referred to different Beings or to forms or attributes of the same Being. All finally decided that there must be several *Zanahary*, basing this on the use of certain plural grammatical forms, but it was plain that the question had not occurred to them until I brought it up.

The reason for this vagueness is that prayers and sacrifices are always addressed to *Zanahary* and the ancestors jointly. The ancestors are all important and the *Zanahary* invocation little more than a polite gesture. My priestly informants were doubtful whether *Zanahary* ever interfered directly in ordinary human affairs. At the same time, as *Zanahary* had made everything and had given power to the ancestors, they had to be mentioned in all rituals. However, *Zanahary* are thought of as individuals, not simply as supernatural power. The concept has nothing of the impersonal, mechanistic quality of Mana.

776 It seems almost certain that the *Zanahary* were at one time more
177 important in the native religion and more clearly individualized.
[768] The present monotheistic trend is due partly to contact with Christians and other monotheistic native groups and partly to a steady increase in the importance of ancestor worship.

RELIGION

163

increase in the importance of ancestor worship. An *ombiasy* told me that the ancient Tanala believed that every human group and species of animal, and even every individual, had its own *Zanahary*, who had created it and looked after its welfare. This belief is still held by the neighboring Bara tribe and there are hints of it in several other tribes. 776 177

The names of the *Zanahary* given in the invocations certainly suggest Beings with different attributes. They include Andranofalafa (god who lives in a house thatched with *falafa*), Mandiovazankoho (god with the clean finger nails), Rangidana (a small, slim-waisted insect, a symbol of speed) and Masomamakizahana (a ceremonial name for the sun). There are a number of other names which can no longer be translated even by the priests. The rituals further indicate that these Beings were believed to live above the sky. One passage suggests that they slept unless awakened by an invocation. Others speak of them as sitting on gold or silver stools, watching men and sending them good and evil. They visited earth when summoned to partake of the sacrifice, returning when they had eaten their share. They went from earth to heaven by means of a chain of gold or a cord of silver. Beyond the names and facts embalmed in the rituals, even the wisest of the priests know nothing. 776

A single gens of the Menabe, the Zafimaniry, consider the sun and moon as Deities and pray and sacrifice to them in sickness or trouble. These sacrifices are made at the regular sacred place or in the *kianza* ("village square"). The ritual is the same as for other sacrifices, the invocation including the ancestors, but the sun and moon are especially appealed to and stressed. Apparently there are no ceremonies for eclipses.

The Ikongo may have originally held the same shadowy beliefs as the Menabe, but they have been monotheists since the beginning of the historic period. To them *Zanahary* signifies a single great and all-powerful deity, creator and ruler of the world. Proverbs indicate that he is considered just and benevolent. He protects the widow and orphan and punishes wrongdoers. At the same time, there is much doubt as to how far he interferes in human affairs. Apparently he is thought to delegate his power to the ancestors, directing them and acting through them. Only great catastrophes or strange and inexplicable events are ascribed to his direct intervention. He is never prayed to except in connection with the ancestors. The term *Zanahary* is also applied here to the souls of dead kings, being linked with their names, like a title.

- 776 The Ikongo have had a good deal of contact with the tribes of
177 the southeast coast, where there have been Arab settlements since the eighth century, and one of their noble gentes claims Arab descent. Their concept of *Zanahary* is probably due to an attenuated Mohammedan influence.

- 776 The relation of *Zanahary* or the *Zanahary* to Fate is so vague in the minds of the natives that they can hardly be said to have any opinion on the subject. In general they conclude that Fate must emanate from the *Zanahary*, who are the source of everything, but they doubt whether the Deities ever intervene after the mechanism had been set going.

- 781 The attitude toward *Zanahary* is due to the practical outlook of the natives. Although the *Zanahary* are great and powerful, they are remote and little interested in human affairs. Nothing is to be gained from them, so there are no emotional attitudes in regard to them. They have been relegated to the abyss of first causes and their number, nature, etc., have ceased to be matters of interest.

NON-HUMAN SPIRITS

- 776 The Tanala have a vague belief in the existence of non-human spirits but, like the Deities, these are of no importance in comparison with the ancestors. They never worship or sacrifice to them and doubt whether they interfere in human affairs.

The *angalampona* (from *angatra*, "spirit," and *ampona*, "foolish") are little Beings about 3 feet tall who live in dense forest. They look like miniature men but are covered with hair and have very long hair on their heads. Their hands and faces are human, but they have pointed teeth, like lemurs. Bits of their hair are often found caught on bushes. They go nude but, although they are both male and female, the sexes cannot be distinguished. During the day they hide in holes, coming out at night to hunt shrimps, which they eat raw. They also steal food from the fields and from houses, and can make the occupants of a house fall into a deep sleep. They are very partial to cooked food and never steal anything else from dwellings. Shrimp catchers, who build rough shelters in the woods and spend the night there, often see them but are never able to catch them. They are considered slightly mischievous but quite harmless.

The *tsiombiomby* (lit. "not an ox") are large Beings in the form of four-footed animals, somewhat like horses. They chase people on lonely roads. There is one on the road between Tombony and

RELIGION

165

Manambo which has chased the mail carriers several times. Ap- 776
parently no one has ever been caught or injured by them.

The *tandranomalany* are mermaids. Three hours' march to the 776
north of Ambohimanga there is a lake called Androrangovola Varitra 773
which is one of their favorite haunts. On the edge of this, one sometimes sees two to four or more women sitting and working raffia or weaving. If approached, they dive into the lake and disappear. Two informants claimed to have seen them themselves. They are thoroughly human in appearance and very handsome. Four or five generations ago a man of the Zafiakotry gens made friends with one of them and she consented to marry him if he would never tell anyone that she was a *tandranomalany*. She came to his village and lived there for several years, bearing him two boys and two girls. Other men in the village often asked him where she came from and envied him his handsome wife. Finally, when drunk, he told them that she was a mermaid. One of their children overheard him and came running to ask her whether it was true. She was very angry and when he returned home she told him that she was going back to her people and would take the children with her. She took the children to the lake and gave each of them a hand of bananas, telling them to dive in and eat the whole bunch under water. Two, a girl and a boy, were able to do this and she plunged into the lake, taking them with her, and never returned. The other two returned to their father, grew up and married ordinary mortals. Their descendants still live in the village and are handsome and of fine physique.

The *tsivalamo onga* are inhabitants of the under world (see 776
Cosmology). They are like men except that their noses are set crosswise on their faces. They never visit our world.

SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

The cult of the dead is all-important in Tanala religion. It 774
forms a complex of interwoven beliefs and practices. The Tanala Menabe believe that man is composed of three parts, the body, the *aïna*, and the *ambiroa*. The *aïna* is the life or vital force and is identified with the breath. It has no form or consciousness and leaves the body only at death. Its fate after death is not clear in the native mind. Some informants said that it ceased to exist, others that it returned to the *Zanahary* who had given it.

The word *ambiroa* signifies "the second part" or "the double." The *ambiroa* has consciousness, personality and form. It is, in fact,